



Catalog No. 7244

PBCC Window

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March 18th, 2007

# THE BIG PICTURE

Our service today is shaped around our new window. You've had a couple of weeks to look at this window, to figure out what is in it. It has been fun to watch you reading the window, especially to see you reading it with your kids. This window is indeed designed to be read, just like the stained glass windows of the old cathedrals in Europe.

The Bible is a story, the great story of God's involvement with the world and of human response to him. This window tells that story pictorially; it is to be read as a story.

The window is structurally designed in four vertical bays, but thematically designed as five acts with a prelude. The prelude is God himself. The five acts are the five major stages in his dealings with the world: creation, Israel, Christ, church, and consummation. We will look at the window in these six parts; between each we will sing.

## Prelude: God

We begin at the very top of the window with God represented by two symbols. On the left is the Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In the Old Testament God declared, "I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isa 44:6; cf. 48:12). In the New Testament the same language is used of both God and Jesus. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End," said Jesus (Rev 22:13; cf. 1:8, 17; 21:6).

Our thinking must begin and end with God. Isaiah was not ready for ministry until he had a vision of God, nor was Jeremiah nor Ezekiel. The beginning of the revelation given to John was an overwhelming vision of the exalted Jesus (Rev 1:12-20). If we don't begin with God we'll get everything wrong. If we don't end with God, if our thinking doesn't lead to the glory of God, we'll be equally wrong. Everything begins and ends with God.

The symbol on the right is the trefoil, formed by three interlocking circles. It is an ancient symbol for the Trinity. God is and always has been a triune God: three in one. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father through the Son. The Trinity is a community of perfect love, goodness and fulfillment. Any love that we can experience is possible only because of the love which exists within the Trinity. The Trinity has no need of anything or anyone else—that includes us and this world.

The two symbols are set against a backdrop of cerulean blue, heavenly blue, the precious color that was used in medieval and renaissance art to represent heaven. What is heaven? Heaven is the realm where God is fully present.

## Act 1: Creation

Completely fulfilled within the triune Godhead, God had no need for anything. Nevertheless he chose to create a world for his glory and pleasure. This creation of the world itself is the first act of God's involvement with the world, and the first bay of our window.

**"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1)**

He created through his word: ten words. We later find that this word is the Son himself. Present also is the Spirit, ready to execute God's will. Starting with a blank slate covered with darkness and sea, God formed the world, then filled it, creating order and fullness. He spoke light into the darkness and put the moon and the stars in place. He created birds for the sky, fish for the sea, and animals for the land, each after their kind. Then he created humans, not after their kind, but after his kind, in his image. To them he delegated rule over his earth. He endowed his blessing upon all life, ensuring that all would be fruitful and successful. He saw that all this was very good: it was exactly what he intended.

In this ordered cosmos, he planted a garden, his sanctuary on earth. In this garden was the tree of life, and from the garden flowed life-giving water. It was here in paradise, filled with life, that God put the humans to enjoy the bounty of his provision. Here they were at harmony with him, with themselves, and with creation. God entrusted to them the care and management of his sanctuary, and gave them a single command to obey: to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They had no need of that knowledge, for God had declared what was good. All they had to do was heed his word, and enjoy him forever.

It was all very good.

## Act 2: Israel

The second act of our story is Israel. We all know that the Old Testament is primarily about Israel, but why? Why is Israel given such prominence in the Bible? Israel has its beginning in the call of Abraham in Genesis 12. But we will not understand Israel or the subsequent acts of the Biblical story if we don't understand what happened between the garden and Abraham—events which, with one important exception, are absent from our window.

Something went wrong in paradise. Eve decided that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food, though God had said it was off-limits. Eve saw that it was good and she took. This is the root of all sin: we make our own decisions of what is good and evil, and we act on them. In so doing, we reject God who, as creator, is the only one qualified to declare what is good and evil.

God expelled the humans from his garden; they were no longer fit to live in his sanctuary. Death entered the world. But God launched a plan of redemption to remove sin, death and evil from his world and to bring humanity back to himself. He promised that humanity would have a son who would crush the serpent (Gen 3:15).

In the short run though, things went from bad to worse: Cain killed his brother, the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men, humanity gathered to build a tower to heaven. Repeatedly God intervened to limit evil. He even performed a complete remod-

el, undoing creation in the Flood, then uncovering a new world. None of this solved the problem of evil, but it clarified the extent of evil: the natural tendency of humanity is to sink into self-centered sin. We will never understand Biblical history if we don't appreciate the depths of this problem. Nevertheless, God made a commitment to keep the earth going, hanging his bow in the sky as a sign to himself:

**“Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.” (Gen 8:21)**

A rainbow arches across the window. Everything that subsequently happens, both the good and the evil, happens under this rainbow. It is against this backdrop of sin and God's covenant commitment to creation that God calls Abraham, promising to give him descendants, a land and his blessing, and to bless all nations through him (Gen 12:2-3). The call of Abraham is God's answer to sin and evil: he begins to form a people for himself and he begins to prepare a home for them.

In the portion of the second bay under the cross, our window shows Israel on pilgrimage from Egypt through Sinai to Jerusalem. The first panel shows Moses leading the Israelites through the sea, after the slaying of the Passover lambs. God repeatedly identifies himself to Israel: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. This is the Old Testament paradigm of salvation: God defeated the forces of evil to deliver his people from bondage to freedom.

The next panel shows Mt Sinai and the Ten Commandments. God brought his people through the wilderness to Sinai. Here he met with them and formally took them as his treasured possession, kingdom of priests and holy nation (Exod 19:4-6). He gave them the two tablets of the Law, the Ten Words, his treaty document binding him and his people together in covenant. He gave them his law: “Be holy as I am holy.” He provided a sacrificial system to atone for sin. It was all so that Israel might dwell in the presence of a holy God.

The trumpets represent four things. Trumpets were blown at each stage of Israel's journey through the wilderness. Every fifty years a trumpet was blown in the Year of Jubilee (*Yobel*, trumpet; Lev 25) to proclaim liberty. Trumpets were blown at Jericho to open Israel's entrance into the Promised Land (Josh 6). Finally, trumpets were blown for the coronation of the king, represented by the crown. God appointed this king over his kingdom to lead his people in righteousness and justice.

A vine winds through the Israel column, for Israel was God's vineyard (Isa 5:1-7). When Israel reached her destiny, each one dwelt under his own vine and fig tree (1 Kgs 4:25; cf. Mic 4:4), a symbol of peace and prosperity.

The final panel shows Jerusalem and its temple. Here in Zion God and his people dwelt together. The goal of Israel's pilgrimage was God himself. In Israel God redeemed a people for himself, and in Zion he dwelt with them.

### Act 3: Christ

The third act is Christ, represented by the cross, surmounted by the Lion and Lamb.

Just as something had gone wrong in Paradise, so something went wrong in Israel. The nation sank into sin, going the same way as

Adam. The vineyard became ruined. Intended to be the solution to the problem, Israel became part of the problem. Called to be a holy nation, Israel became indistinguishable from the other nations. God finally removed his presence and expelled Israel from the land, just as he had expelled Adam and Eve from the garden. But he promised that he would come and save his people through his Messiah, his anointed one.

Israel expected that this Messiah would be a conquering hero, a lion from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:9), who would destroy God's enemies, Israel's enemies. But when God sent his Messiah, Jesus, the Jewish leaders were scandalized. He ate with tax collectors, prostitutes, sinners. He healed lepers and pronounced forgiveness of sins, things which could only be done by the priests in the Jerusalem temple. To those who cried out, “Lord have mercy,” he gave mercy. The leaders didn't make that cry; they wanted justice not mercy, for they assumed they were in the right and everyone else in the wrong. Jesus made a final pilgrimage to Jerusalem and its temple, joining with all Israel. Finding the temple to be a den of rebels he cleansed it, an implicit claim to be the king, for the spiritual health of the temple, of God's earthly dwelling-place, was the responsibility of the king, the one appointed by God to tend and care for his kingdom.

This was too much! Saying, “We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19:15), the Jewish leaders banded with their supposed enemies, the Romans, to kill Jesus. The Son of God died on the cross as the rest of Israel ate its Passover lambs and remembered its deliverance from Egypt.

Evil reached its climax, making its greatest assault against God and his purposes. The ruler of the kingdom of darkness brought even the Son of God into his realm of death, removing the light which God had again spoken into the world. Throughout the sabbath day Jesus' body lay in the grave, and the destiny of the world hung in the balance. On the Sunday, the eighth day, the first day of a new week, God raised his Son from death. This Son, who had taken on human form as the new image of God, had done no wrong; he had done what Adam and Israel had failed to do: be a faithful and obedient servant. Therefore death could not hold him. God vindicated him in the resurrection, and again in the ascension, raising him back to heaven where he has installed him as King.

The lamb atop the cross is in the form of an ancient symbol, the *agnus dei*, or Lamb of God, colloquially called “The Lamb and Flag.” The Lamb stands as though slain (Rev 5:6). He is pierced by the cross, but from the cross flies the banner of resurrection, a red cross against a white background. The halo indicates divinity for this is the Son of God. God himself entered into human history to defeat evil and put the world right, even at great cost to himself.

**“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)**

With the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's enemies are defeated: not the Romans or the Jews, but evil, Satan, death and sin. With Jesus' ascension to heaven there is a human in God's presence. With Christ's enthronement there is a faithful and true ruler over God's kingdom. The Son returns to the Father, fully justifying his declaration,

**“This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.” (Matt 3:17; 17:5; 2 Pet 1:17)**

## Act 4: Church

The fourth act, represented by the third bay under the cross, is the church.

In the death and resurrection of his Son, God has defeated evil: sin, Satan, death. He has installed a king over his kingdom. But what good does that do us?

Through his Spirit, always represented as a dove, God births a new people on earth. As he spoke light into darkness in the beginning, God through his Spirit now shines his light into our dark hearts (2 Cor 4:6), breathes his life into our dead bodies. Through his Spirit God gives us the resurrection life of his Son, giving us faith in the provision that he has made in his Son for our salvation.

The vine that was Israel winds also through this panel. Jesus declared, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1). He was the faithful remnant of Israel distilled down to one, the only one who was faithful to God. Into this true vine, Jew and Gentile together are now being grafted as branches.

The church is a community, here represented by three people with arms embraced. We are a community gathered around the Scriptures, which contain the gospel of grace, testifying to God’s saving work in Christ. And we are gathered around the eucharist: the cup and the broken bread in which we commune with one another and with God, in which we remember and proclaim the Lord’s death, and in which we express our ongoing identification with Christ.

There are three pairs of hands. The top pair is reached up, both to receive the Holy Spirit, and in praise to God. The middle pair, two hands of different colors, is reached out in peace and reconciliation, for the church is a family in which all are reconciled, not only to God, but also to one another, in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The third pair of hands reaches out to the world, for Christ has sent his people out into all the world as his witnesses (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). From all nations Jesus Christ is assembling a people for his Father. The church sends out missionaries to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel. The church itself is also missional, sent into the world as God’s agent of healing, sent to be salt and light.

God has gathered us in Christ to be his family.

## Act 5: Consummation

The fourth vertical bay depicts the fifth and final act, the climax of the Biblical stories of creation and redemption. This is where the rainbow leads, to the new heavens and the new earth. The joining of heaven and earth is not possible until evil is removed from earth and all is made holy and therefore fit for God’s presence. Here all space and time is holy, and God’s presence is universal.

Purple represents the royal majesty of God. Trumpets again proclaim the coronation of the king, this time the King of kings (Rev 17:14; 19:16). The cry goes up,

**“The kingdom of the world has become  
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah,  
and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev 11:15)**

In Revelation John sees an innumerable multitude from all nations gathered in heaven singing praise to God and the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10). In the window we see God’s people gathered as a community with harp and lyre singing praise to God. God’s people are a people who sing, both here and in heaven. We have been given much

to sing about. We have been redeemed to the praise of his glory (Eph 1:6, 12, 14).

The goal of our pilgrimage is New Jerusalem, a city so vast that it fills the whole cosmos. This is the city of God’s people and the city of God himself. But here there is no temple, for God himself is its temple. The twelve jewels in the foundations represent the people of God, for this city is the people. This is the heavenly city built by God for those who long to dwell in his presence.

The city is also Paradise restored. Here the river of life flows from God’s throne (Rev 22:1-2), bringing life. Here the tree of life grows on either side of the river; its leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22:2). Here the lion and the lamb lie down together (Isa 11:6; 65:25), as peace, harmony and wholeness is restored to the created order. The whole creation, which has been groaning in the pains of childbirth, is released from its bondage to decay and brought into glorious freedom (Rom 8:19-22).

The stories of creation and redemption reach their climax. The one story is contained within the other, redemption within creation. The end is not just a recovery of the beginning but something much better. The first creation was very good but it was not perfect. The sanctification of the seventh day raised the possibility that holiness might be extended to the whole creation. Though Adam and Eve dwelt in God’s earthly sanctuary their experience of God’s direct presence was limited, for heaven and earth were separate realms.

In the new heavens and the new earth, these two realms are joined together. All space and time is holy. God’s presence is fully experienced, for we “will see his face” (Rev 22:4). The end is far better than the beginning.

Within this larger story of creation, unfolds the story of redemption. We don’t know why God allows evil in his world, but we do see what God is doing about evil: he is in the process of removing it entirely. At the center stands the cross.

He delivered Israel out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to himself to dwell in his presence. Through the death and resurrection of his Son, and the life-giving ministry of his Spirit, he has delivered us from bondage to sin and death to bring us to himself to dwell in his presence. At the heart lies God’s oft-repeated purpose statement: “I will be your God, you will be my people, and I will dwell with you.” This is gloriously fulfilled in the new heavens and the new earth:

**“Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Rev 21:3)**

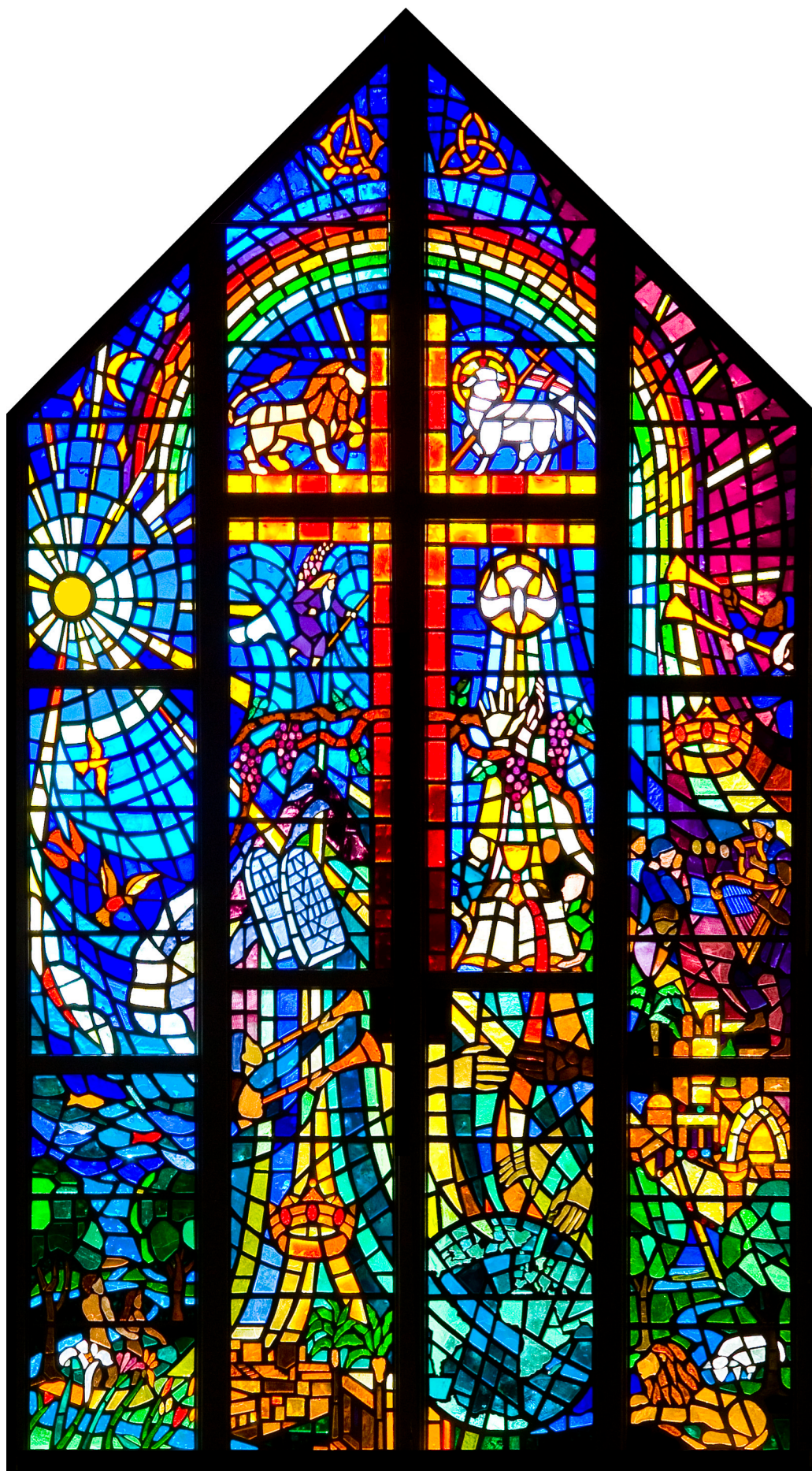
To God be the glory, great things he has done!

**“You are worthy, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power,  
for you created all things,  
and by your will they were created  
and have their being.” (Rev 4:11)**

**“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,  
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength  
and honor and glory and praise!” (Rev 5:12)**

**May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)**





This message from Scripture was preached at Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino on March 18th, 2007. PBCC is located at 10601 N Blaney Ave, Cupertino, CA 95014. Tel (408) 366 6690. Website: [www.pbcc.org](http://www.pbcc.org).